



Feinstein, Pombo Request Coordinated Emergency Response & Evacuation Plan for Bay Delta

March 29, 2006

Washington, DC – U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and House Resources Committee Chairman Richard W. Pombo (R-Calif.) sent a letter to government officials today requesting the design of a comprehensive, coordinated emergency response and evacuation plan to implement should disaster ever strike California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta. The Bay Delta levees are among the nation's most vital levees, protecting and providing water for 23 million Californians.

"The Bay Delta needs to be prepared with an emergency response and evacuation plan should a major levee breach imperil hundreds of thousands of people," Senator Feinstein said. **"The lesson of Katrina has to be that we recognize potential threats to the lives of our citizens before they happen, and move aggressively to have a full plan in place to prevent panic and fatalities."**

"We are doing everything humanly possible to identify and repair the weaknesses facing the Bay Delta levees," Chairman Pombo said. **"However, an emergency response and evacuation plan must be put in place in case the unthinkable happens. We can not and will not let the devastation that occurred in New Orleans come to pass in the Bay Delta."**

Chairman Pombo and Senator Feinstein directed their concerns and request of an emergency response and communications plan to Homeland Security Director, Michael Chertoff; Acting Director of FEMA, R. David Paulison; and the Director of California Office of Emergency Preparedness, Henry Renteria. The letter requests plans, capabilities, and preparations be made including: pre-positioning of materials during heavy rains, rapid response of government contractors and emergency personnel, immediate closure of levee breaks and coordinated evacuation routes for mass exodus.

The text of the letter follows:

Michael Chertoff, Director
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

R. David Paulison, Acting Director
Federal Emergency Management Administration
500 C Street SW
Washington, D.C. 20472

Henry R. Renteria, Director
California Office of Emergency Services
3650 Schriever Blvd.
Mather, CA 95655

Dear Sirs:

As you know, California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Bay Delta (Delta) has minimal flood protection and its levees are highly susceptible to widespread failure in the event of a significant earthquake, flood or other calamity. The resulting damage from such an event could easily exceed the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast.

Work is in progress to maintain, repair and rebuild these levees with appropriate federal and state leadership and assistance. Despite the current dedication to resolving this problem, ensuring adequate levee protection will take many years. Even then, experts agree, some levees may still not withstand a sizable earthquake. The net result will not only lead to economic, environmental and social catastrophe in the region, but would also severely impact federal and State of California (State) pumps moving large amounts of water to southern California.

For this reason, it is imperative that the federal, state and local governments have a coordinated emergency preparedness and response capability for massive levee failure and subsequent flooding in the area. It is abundantly clear from the Jones Tract levee failure in 2004 that local reclamation districts have limited financial means to respond to such emergencies and federal and state assistance is necessary, especially on an entire levee network affecting millions of Californians. Failure to respond immediately to close levee breaks and to dewater flooded areas could result in a series of additional consequences, greatly expanding original losses.

We understand that the State is developing a Delta Risk Management Strategy to assess appropriate actions to preserve the Delta in times of natural disaster. We commend the State for this important endeavor, but it was clear from a House Resources Committee hearing last year on Central Valley levees and from our recent helicopter tour of the Delta, that more must be done on an emergency preparedness and response level.

Specifically, we hereby request a full accounting as to the current degree of federal, state, and local preparedness for a massive levee failure in California, including proof of a coordinated response and recovery capability should such an event occur. This coordination is critical, as we have learned from the Katrina disaster, and will make or break the efficacy of our response to potential catastrophes. In particular we ask to know the plans, capabilities, and preparations for the following necessities:

- Pre-positioning of rock materials to fight floods
- Early warning flood systems
- Contracting barges and other equipment
- Immediate closure of levee breaks
- Dewatering flooded areas and restoration of levee and interior drainage systems
- Emergency response plans executed by local community fire fighters, emergency medical technicians, paramedics, and police officers
- Response plans in the event of a chemical or biological attack contaminating and/or threatening the levees and the water system
- Inventories of emergency communications equipment and recommendations for

- upgrades and improvements
- Assessments of all available emergency personnel and assignments of responsibilities for response scenarios
 - Expanded training and drill exercises for responders as appropriate, and
 - Executing coordinated evacuation measures
 - Particular unique preparations needed for levee failure caused by earthquake and spring runoff
 - In addition, beyond emergency planning and the needs listed above we ask to know what other steps are being taken to ensure comprehensive and fully coordinated preparedness and response capabilities by all levels of government for a massive levee failure.

We expect a coherent and clearly-coordinated strategy that dictates operational assignments for all levels of government, including set criteria which would trigger advance escalation from state to federal agencies. The current system of progressive assistance based on the exhaustion of resources of local and state agencies before federal assistance is made available has certainly proven inadequate.

Based on the urgency of the situation, we further request a full response in a timely manner. We cannot stress enough how critical comprehensive and coordinated preparation will be toward protecting human life, property and the future of our State.

Communications failures and lack of preparation compounded the disasters we experienced in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, especially as they related to evacuation. We have an opportunity - indeed a responsibility - to prevent the same mistakes when it comes to protecting the Delta and the millions of Californians who depend on it. We look forward to hearing from and working with you on this important effort, and will make our staffs available to you to assist with this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Richard Pombo
Member of Congress

cc: Karen Armes, Acting Regional Director
FEMA, Region IX
1111 Broadway, Suite 1200
Oakland, CA 94607

Mike Chrisman, Secretary
California Resources Agency
1416 9th Street,
Sacramento, CA 95814

Lt. General Carl Strock, Chief of Engineers
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20314

John Keys, III, Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240-0001

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